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SUBJECT: MEDIA REPORT: FIDEL CASTRO

¶1. Summary: Santiago dailies on February 20 ran extensive coverage of Fidel Castro's resignation. Dailies quoted President Bush calling for a democratic transition in Cuba and Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte's remarks that the U.S. would not lift the embargo. Newspaper-of-record "El Mercurio" ran an editorial stating that Cuba's transition will largely depend on the U.S. stance. Remaining coverage summarized reactions in Chile and recapped Castro's nearly 50 years in power. End Summary.

Coverage of U.S. Reaction

¶2. El Mercurio, conservative, influential newspaper-of-record (circ. 129,000, 2/20) headlined: "The U.S. embargo on Cuba becomes the main topic of discussion"

¶3. "President Bush said Castro's resignation should be the beginning of a democratic transition for Cuba and called for the release of political prisoners on the island. But the President did not comment on one of the central issues of his country's relations with Cuba -- the embargo.... John Negroponte did.... Negroponte dismissed any gesture by the Bush administration toward the post-Fidel government of alleviating the embargo. 'I don't think that will happen in the immediate future,' said Negroponte emphatically."

¶4. La Nacion, government-owned, editorially independent (circ. 4,200) ran: "U.S. will keep the embargo on Cuba" Subheadline read: The second man in the Department of State, John Negroponte, ruled out lifting the embargo "in the near future."

¶5. "President Bush was not satisfied with Castro's retirement and said he would keep the embargo on the island. He also reiterated his demand for a democratic transition in the island. 'I see this as a period of transition that could be the beginning of a democratic transition for the people of Cuba,' said Bush."

GOC and Other Local Reactions

¶6. Acting Foreign Affairs Minister Alberto Van Klaveren said Castro's resignation "marks the end of a cycle and the beginning of another. He said Chile must follow the process "with respect and interest," and expressed the GOC's interest in having "absolutely normal relations" with Cuba ("El Mercurio").

¶7. Government-spokesman Francisco Vidal said the government hopes that Castro's resignation "will take the island to a new horizon," adding that it is important that the government and the people of Cuba "decide that new path." ("La Nacion").

¶8. Christian Democratic Party leader Nelson Haddad said Castro's resignation "opens a window of opportunity to begin the transition toward a representative democracy that includes the reestablishment

of political rights and freedom."

¶9. Renovacion Nacional President Carlos Larrain stated: There will be no changes, because the Communist Party is still in power ("El Mercurio").

¶10. Carlos Tudela (DC) said: "We hope this new political scenario reflects respect for human rights, individual freedom, democratic principles" ("La Nacion").

¶11. Socialist Party President Camilo Escalona stated: Cuba must resolve its future challenges without foreign Intervention (afternoon "La Segunda," circ. 33,000).

¶13. OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza: "Any change must stem from democratic and peaceful dialogue from within Cuba and under no circumstances from abroad" (Leading-circulation, popular "Las Ultimas Noticias," circ. 140,000).

Editorials

¶14. "Estrategia," business and financial (circ. 30,000) editorial entitled, "Uncertain Transition in Cuba" concludes: "All in all, Castro's decision is a positive event that could bring a better future for his fellow citizens."

¶15. "La Tercera," conservative, independent (circ. 101,000) "Fidel Castro's resignations: An Upredictable Transition"

"The consensus is that Cuba is heading toward a transition, because the type of regime on the island today... is not viable without Fidel. In this transition, a key element will be the U.S. stance.... Will Washington be more proactive now that the Castro regime is beginning to write its final chapter...? The second man in the Department of State said yesterday that the embargo on the island would not end any time in the near future. That is a discouraging sign, because there are grounded reasons to believe that the embargo helped Castro remain in power rather than hurt him.

¶16. It is not in anyone's interest for the situation in Cuba to deteriorate... and there is no reason for this to happen, except in the case of international intervention.... In any case, the first mistake would be to assume that Castro and his regime are dead."

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